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New Man in a Bigger Post

Allen gets ousted; Clark gets his job and more authority too

"Dick, I just want you to know how delighted I am that both the Justice Department and my own counsel have cleared you of any wrongdoing in this silly fuss about wristwatches and a misplaced $1,000. It was all so unfair to you. In fact, Dick, your service to the nation has been exemplary. Now, I must ask you to turn in your resignation."

Those, of course, were not the exact words used by Ronald Reagan as he dismissed Richard Allen as his National Security Adviser during a 25-min. meeting in the Oval Office last week. Still the President's basic message may have sounded very much that way to an embittered Allen, as the man at the top confirmed what some of his aides had been deliberately leaking to reporters for weeks: Allen was out, in the most important personnel change of the Administration's first year.

Although the timing inevitably linked his departure with the miniscandal, there were other reasons why Allen got the gate. He neither liked nor got along with Secretary of State Alexander Haig, and rarely hesitated to reveal that in public. He had not been effectively performing even his limited duties as a low-profile coordinator of foreign policy advice. He had been saddled with an impossible task, serving as a presidential adviser with no real clout and limited access to Reagan. With the job about to be redefined and strengthened, he simply did not have the personality or stature to handle it.

Allen was not widely liked at the White House, but some presidential aides felt that the Administration had treated him unfairly. Said one adviser, who had urged that Allen be removed from his post: "Dick had a damn tough job and I felt sorry for him. He had responsibility without authority." Although Allen showed his bitterness, calling his ouster an act of "political sabotage," he gamely refrained from any name-calling. He agreed to serve temporarily as a part-time consultant (at $190 per day) to help organize the newly created Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, which will use experts outside of Government to evaluate the performance of intelligence agencies for the President.

Allen's letter of resignation praised Reagan's "historic presidency" and declared: "Your trust and confidence are a source of deep pride and satisfaction." In a "Dear Dick" answer, Reagan said that Allen had "served our nation with great distinction" and expressed "admiration for your personal integrity."

In their final meeting Allen had asked Reagan to let him stay on the job. Even if the post were given heavier responsibilities, he was confident he could handle them. As gently as he could, the President demurred. If Allen were to stay in office, Reagan said, he would be the object of continuing press criticism, and perhaps even a congressional investigation led by Democrats on Capitol Hill. Reagan had expressed to aides his annoyance at the heavy press attention given to Allen's negotiations with Japanese magazine writers who had interviewed the First Lady last January.

Displaying what one member of the NSC staff called "gutsy good humor," Allen attended a brief farewell meeting with about 25 of his former aides. He entered the room doing an impersonation of Richard Nixon, waggling his hands in a double "V" for victory and glowering at his audience. More seriously, he said he had never favored the tight limitations under which he had labored. He suggested that if the role of National Security Adviser is enhanced, other staff members will be able to make more of a contribution to the council's work.

As expected, Reagan quickly appointed William P. Clark, who had been Haig's top deputy and the State Department's second highest official, to Allen's vacated post. Clark *(see box)* will have one immediate advantage that Allen lacked: he will brief the President daily on world affairs and will not have to report through an intermediary. Allen's approaches to Reagan always had to be made through Presidential Counsellor Edwin Meese, who was one of Allen's last-ditch defenders. Clark enjoys another edge: as chief of staff for Reagan when he was Governor of California, Clark had been the boss of Meese and Michael Deaver, two members of the President's current troika. Whether there will now be, in effect, a quartet remains to be seen.

One reason for enlarging the National Security Adviser's role is to have someone in the White House who can mediate the frequent policy disputes between Haig and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger. When there are disagreements between them, or between the Secretaries and CIA Director William Casey, Clark will funnel the recommendations to the President in a form that he can handle. Since he has Reagan's ear as well as his confidence, Clark should be influential enough to relay Reagan's wishes back to Haig, Weinberger and Casey, thus precluding contradictory statements by these officials and their spokesmen.

There is one potentially serious flaw in the arrangement. Clark has less experience in foreign affairs than any other head of the NSC staff. As New York *Times* Columnist William Safire asked a bit acidly last week: "Who will brief the briefer?" One possible answer is that Clark

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will hire unusually well qualified deputies for his NSC staff. The notion is that he can mediate Cabinet-level disputes, competently prepare options for the President and retain the confidence of his peers, even if they do not respect his personal judgment on the substantive issues involved.

While the new system provides more authority for Clark than Allen enjoyed, he will be considerably less influential in formulating policy than some of his strong predecessors: McGeorge Bundy for Presidents Kennedy and Johnson; Henry Kissinger for Nixon; Zbigniew Brzezinski for Carter. All of those officials served under Presidents who emphatically wanted to design, as well as to control, foreign policy. All were also strong-minded theoreticians with distinct policy ideas of their own. Both Kissinger and Brzezinski, who were particularly iron-willed, ran into sharp conflicts with Secretaries of State. The new Reagan setup may prevent that kind of tension. Whether it will also provide the best possible advice to a President who is still a novice in foreign affairs is questioned by some critics of this system.

Allen's farewell

Brzezinski understandably prefers what he calls "the presidential" model, in which foreign policy direction is centralized in the White House. In a *Washington Quarterly* interview, he concedes that "the secretarial" system can also be effective. This model, in which a strong Secretary of State dominates foreign policy, worked with Dean Acheson (under Truman), John Foster Dulles (Eisenhower) and Kissinger (Ford). All three Presidents, in Brzezinski's view, were "relatively passive and disengaged" in formulating foreign policy. He expected Reagan to adopt the decentralized system. But so far, contends Brzezinski, Reagan has installed neither, and the result has been "chaos and confusion." Haig, Brzezinski argues, "is very able and is the outstanding member of the team but is deliberately checkmated."

The choice of Clark as Allen's replacement met with general approval in Washington. Leaders of the Republican New Right view Clark as a true-blue Reaganite, although not as predictably conservative as Allen is. His colleagues at the State Department came to trust Clark as a clear thinker who had a gift for calming his sometimes tempestuous boss. At his first press conference, Clark conceded that he may bump heads in the future with Haig. "The conflict of which you speak is inherent in the system," said Clark. "It's healthy—the give and take of ideas that must exist in a democracy."

One of Clark's first jobs will be to deal with other personnel matters. General Brent Scowcroft, a former adviser to the National Security Council, is expected to be named as special Middle East negotiator. Filling Clark's old office at State may be more controversial. Reagan approved Haig's recommendation that Walter Stoessel, a career diplomat who now ranks third in the department, be elevated to the Clark post and that Lawrence Eagleburger, assistant secretary for European affairs, fill Stoessel's spot. But Eagleburger, a top assistant to Kissinger at both NSC and State under Nixon, is distrusted by conservatives as too strong an advocate of détente with the Soviets. If Clark gets involved in the probable Senate fight over confirming these nominations, his mediating skills will be put to a difficult test. *—By Ed Magnuson. Reported by Laurence I. Barrett/Washington*